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The following submission to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services is compiled by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Kimberley. An organisation invested in the economic growth and development of the Kimberley region and contracted to deliver Workforce Australia Local Jobs (Local Jobs) for the Broome employment region; RDA Kimberley have addressed two of the Terms of Reference stipulated.

RDA Kimberley is part of a national network of 55 RDA committees. Our organisation has an active and facilitative role in the Kimberley to improve regional development outcomes, achieved through collaboration across all levels of government, private sector, and community.

The Shire of Broome has experienced steady population and economic growth since 2018, with several private sector and government investments underway or in development. With a wealth of natural assets in the Kimberley region and proximity to growing Indo Pacific markets, this presents many exciting opportunities which are all expected to further stimulate the employment market and contribute to regional domestic growth.

The Local Jobs program aligns with RDA Kimberley's strategic priorities and desired outcomes for the region, supporting the development and delivery of tailored and bespoke approaches to upskill and reskill the local workforce, with the aim to ensure the maximum number of people are placed in appropriate employment and training opportunities to support local labour market needs.

As the organisation contracted to deliver this program on behalf of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), Broome Employment Facilitators (employed through RDA Kimberley) work closely with Workforce Australia Employment Service Providers in the Broome employment region.

RDA Kimberley acknowledges Workforce Australia Employment Services are stationed across the country, however for the purpose of this submission we will be referring to those services delivered in the Broome employment region.

RDA Kimberley welcomes the opportunity to further discuss any of the issues and recommendations raised and contained in the following submission.

Yours Sincerely,



**ELSIA ARCHER OAM
CHAIR
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA KIMBERLEY**



INQUIRY INTO WORKFORCE AUSTRALIA EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

As the service provider for Local Jobs in the Broome employment region, this inquiry is pertinent to our organisations service delivery and could have a major influence on the future delivery of this program.

RDA Kimberley therefore makes the following comments and recommendations to two of the Terms of Reference stipulated:

(a) the implementation, performance and appropriateness of Workforce Australia Employment Services;

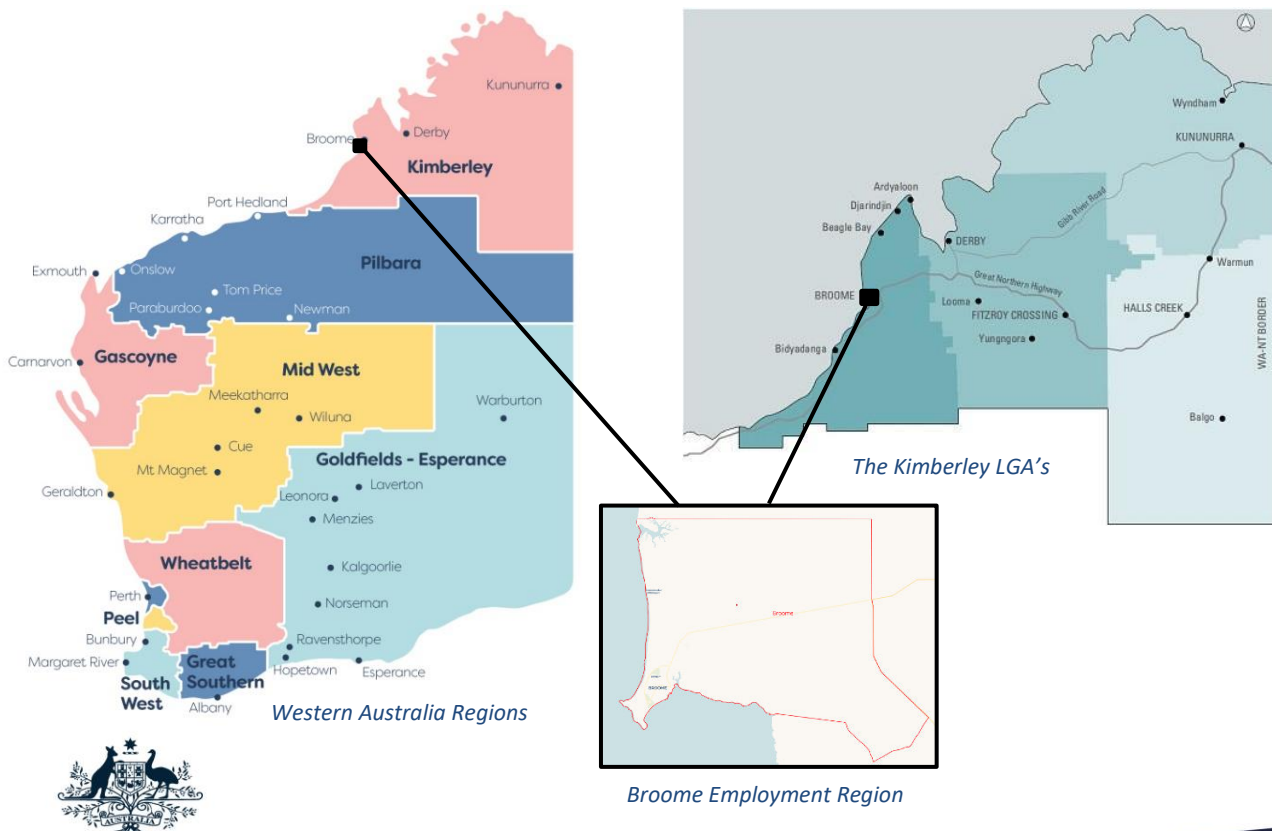
To address this point, it is crucial for the Select Committee and Government to understand the employment region and demographic of people seeking these services. These factors influence and impact the implementation and performance of Workforce Australia Employment Services. Understanding these points will also provide better context and allude to the appropriateness of the services.

Broome Employment Region

The Broome employment region which Workforce Australia Employment Services cover is approximately 1500 kms² or one fifth of the Shire of Broome. The Shire of Broome is one of four local government areas in the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia, covering an area of 55,796 kms², most of which is sparsely populated.

The Kimberley covers one-sixth of Western Australia's landmass spanning over 420,000 km² and consists of six towns, over 160 Indigenous communities, 92 cattle station dwellings, and remote world-class resorts. Broome is the largest of these townships.

The remainder of this region, and the neighbouring region of Pilbara, do not fall under Workforce Australia services but are under the Community Development Program (CDP). The Australian Government's remote employment and community development service.



The Shire of Broome has seen steady population growth since 2016, with an approximate resident population of 18,209 as of 30th June 2021ⁱ, but faces socio-economic disadvantage (including unprecedented juvenile crime rates); high cost of living and business; and severe shortages in housing and workforce.

Broome is unique due to its seasonal economy, geographically spread supply chain, remote communities, and prominence of tourism in the jobs profile. Broome's population swells during the tourist season, welcoming approximately 270,000 visitors between April and September each year. Accommodating this large shift in population significantly impacts the availability of local produce and demand in service industries.

Development in the mining and resource sector together with Covid policy driving up domestic tourism has resulted in some economic growth since 2018, however despite the mining and resource sector being the most productive industry, health care and social assistance remains the largest employer, generating 1,249 local jobs in 2020/21 and accounting for 15.5% of employment in Broomeⁱⁱ. This figure highlights the structure of Broome's economy, the provision of services due to the fluctuation of the population seasonally, and reliance of government services provided and delivered from Broome due to higher populations of people that experience low socio-economic conditions.

Broome is the main service centre for the broader Kimberley region, and whilst the Kimberley has a diverse range of economic drivers, the Shire of Broome's economy is highly reliant on tourism and the flow-on impact the tourism dollar brings to local businesses, households, and services. Further to this, over half of Broome's local businesses are non-employing/owner-operator, including a large cohort of trades qualified workers.

Demographic

To provide a snapshot of the local workforce in the township of Broome, the Indigenous people represent 23% of Broome's population, but when it comes to workforce participation and unemployment rates, there are major imbalances. Overall, the Indigenous people unemployment rate is 5.3% compared with 0.8% for non-Indigenous people, and in terms of labour participation, 27.27% of Indigenous people stated in the 2021 Census, are not in the labour force. As a point of comparison, 7.75% of non-Indigenous people stated they were not in the labour forceⁱⁱⁱ.

Indigenous people are the largest cohort on Workforce Australia Employment Services caseloads representing 85% of the caseload, followed closely by Youth, Mature Age (>50) and People with Disabilities. They are often attributed to remaining on the caseload more than 2 years. 89% on the Broome employment region caseload require the services of Workforce Employment Services in-person, and do not access Workforce Australia services online.

For a complex range of reasons many Indigenous people in the region experience challenging social and economic circumstances, including significantly higher rates of unemployment, incarceration, substance abuse, and suicide compared to other Australians. This current status presents challenges such as increased pressure on health and community services, higher welfare dependency in some segments of the community, and related anti-social behaviours.

Issues which have impacted the job readiness of some people in Broome include the lack of driving licenses, access to transport, limited language, literacy and numeracy skills, cultural differences and lack of confidence approaching the employment market, difficulties obtaining police clearances and limited employability skills and work experience.



Developing soft skills and teamwork, building resilience, emotional capacity, and motivation, and providing on the job mentoring support and wrap around services have been identified as crucial to building training and employment pathways and continued retention in the workplace for the most disadvantaged people seeking employment in Broome.

Workforce Australia Employment Services in the Broome Employment Region

Significant extra resources are required to be provided by the Workforce Australia Employment Services in this employment region to engage, motivate and ensure continued training and employment pathways. The term “wrap around services” is one which is often raised and discussed in meetings between service providers, industry stakeholders and other providers working in the employment space, but how this transpires on-the-ground is a lot more complex. These services require considerable manpower, time, and capital. Extra resources (both human and capital) are stretched, and sadly questionable if this is being delivered to the extent needed, despite the best efforts of service providers.

A further point to consider is the large degree of transience in/out and across the region due to seasonal conditions and cultural practices. Placing Workforce Australia Employment Services in the township of Broome, surrounded by CDP serviced towns, communities and regions, does not consider the regional ties nor the demographic or intensive needs of the majority of people requiring these services.

(b) other matters in relation to Workforce Australia Employment Services.

Digital Access & Literacy

Whilst RDA Kimberley acknowledges the work by Workforce Australia to develop a more flexible employment service, the greater focus and move towards online services does not assist nor reflect the needs of those predominantly utilising the services in the Broome employment region.

In the 2016 Census the Shire of Broome recorded 68% per cent of households had internet access. This is considerably lower than the national average of 80%^{iv}, indicating a significant digital divide. As highlighted above, internet connection is now an important utility for most households, increasingly required for accessing essential information, employment, and government services, and taking part in the digital economy.

Digital literacy and access remain a challenge for many people on the Workforce Australia Employment Services caseload in the Broome employment region, resulting in an increased need for in-person assistance and a further demand on employment service providers.

Remoteness of Service

As highlighted above, the Broome employment region is surrounded by towns, communities and regions serviced by the Community Development Program (CDP). A remote employment and community development service administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency; the objectives of this program better align with the needs of the people utilising Workforce Australia Employment Services in the Broome employment region.

RDA Kimberley acknowledges this program is not without its challenges and work is ongoing in this space, however a program developed in partnership with First Nations people, delivered for people specifically living in remote regions and with community development at the core may have better outcomes than the present status quo.



Further to this, the current remoteness and provision of providers in the region restricts a person's rights to change service provider. RDA Kimberley understands this is an important right of an unemployed person if a service provider is unable to fulfill their obligations.

Regional Perceptions vs Reality

RDA Kimberley wish for it to be noted the perception of the Broome employment region as a region "where there may be fewer opportunities to apply for jobs", as stated on the Workforce Australia website to be untrue.

Comments raised at the recent Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services held on the 3 November 2022 suggest this is a belief shared by those sitting on this committee and this perception was not dispelled by the Department of Employment and Workforce Relations.

Mr BROADBENT: For instance, you have one provider in Broome, to my knowledge. Is that correct?

Mr Smyth: Yes.

Mr BROADBENT: That's like the government of the day contracting out a service into the community to do a particular job. There is no competition. **The labour market there would be difficult except for people who are highly talented in tourism and hospitality and those sorts of things**—they don't all want to go pearl diving. Do you want to go pearl diving?

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Workforce shortages are acute across many industry sectors, but predominantly in the tourism, hospitality, aged care, and childcare industry sectors in many **entry-level roles**. Over 400 jobs are currently listed on the search engine SEEK, with a further 200+ across local sites and community noticeboards. Whilst Broome experiences seasonal shifts in demand, there is always an ongoing demand for a multitude of entry level roles, especially in the hospitality sector, which need to be filled year-round.

RDA Kimberley would argue the labour market, which is later suggested as the reason for a service provider to 'not look like they are a strong performer', would in fact not be the contributing factor. As an organisation based in the region of topic and working with Workforce Australia Employment Services, this highlights the disconnect between those living and working in metropolitan areas speaking on behalf of the regions, and those living and working on-the-ground in the most remote regions.

It would be far easier to accept if this were the case, but rather it needs to be acknowledged the complexity of delivering a service which is not suited to the region nor meeting the intensive needs of those on the Workforce Australia caseload in Broome. This is not just 'tailoring a person's points target to their circumstance', but investigating and addressing the root cause of many of the social issues which is ultimately impacting participation and engagement with service providers.



Conclusion

Again, noting the complexity of the employment services system, it will be imperative the Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services understands each region in which Workforce Australia Employment Services operate, as this will provide guidance and better context to the terms of reference stipulated.

It needs to be acknowledged each employment region has its own issues, challenges, and barriers. We ask that you listen to those living and working in each of these employment regions to determine implementation, performance, and appropriateness of Workforce Australia Employment Services. What may work in metropolitan areas may not work in the regions.

RDA Kimberley welcomes the review and Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Service Providers in the Broome employment region with the consideration to the remoteness and needs of people on the caseload.

RDA Kimberley propose programs delivered by service providers better align and reflect those of the surrounding regions, with greater focus and resources towards community development to build the regions capacity and a sustainable workforce to take advantage of the upcoming economic opportunities.

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia (3218.0). Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions). <https://economy.id.com.au/rda-kimberley/population?WebID=110>

ⁱⁱ National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2021. Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions). <https://economy.id.com.au/rda-kimberley/employment-by-industry?WebID=110>

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats, Broome. <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQS510011262>

^{iv} Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011 and 2016. Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions). <https://profile.id.com.au/rda-kimberley/internet-connection?WebID=100&BMID=50>

